

## VII.—FAT AND BLOOD, AND HOW TO MAKE THEM.

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By S. Weir Mitchell, M. D. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co. Chicago: Jansen, McClurg & Co. Pages, 101. 1877.

This plain and well written little book has a practical value wholly disproportional to its size. It sets forth nothing new, in fact, and not much that is new in a practical way. The matter of the work is hence not, strictly speaking, a fresh contribution to medical knowledge, but its value consists in the practical and common sense stress which is laid on certain important facts in the treatment of that vast multitude of cases, in which there comes to be from various causes, an impaired nutrition, often comprising anæmia, in various degrees, and always neurasthenia, and all that these terms may imply, and which continue for years often, among the opprobria of medical practice.

This little work comes to us with a *plan*, sensible and practicable, for the management of such cases, a plan which commends itself to the common sense of every physician of experience. It comprises two main features, which correspond to the two great phases of nutrition: *waste and repair*.

In the cases referred to by Dr. Mitchell, waste has overtaken the process of repair, so that a thorough loss of balance as between these two factors has occurred. The dictates of a sound experience would be to stop, or reduce to its minimum, the process of waste, and to increase the materials for, and quicken the process of repair. And these are the main teachings of the book. It is essentially an expansion of a lecture by the author on "Rest in the Treatment of Nervous Diseases," published in the "American Clinical Series," by Dr. Seguin. That lecture was noticed in our pages at the time of its appearance.

The first brief chapter is on "Fat in its Clinical Relations." Dr. Mitchell lays, very properly, much stress on the clinical inquiry as to whether the patient "is losing or has lost flesh, is by habit thin or fat?" He says "this question is one of the utmost moment in every point of view, and deserves a larger share of attention than it receives." To this we heartily agree. In his few remarks on the intimate relations of fat to the nourishment of the tissues and blood, Dr. Mitchell utters practical truths, without troubling himself apparently as to their real order of sequence, or what seem to be their true causal relations. We have often noticed in our author's writings a want of a delicate adjustment of facts in view of their relations, which bespeaks want of care, or of practice, in the finer procedures of analytic

reflection. As instances under this head, we would cite the following passages: He says, "We too rarely reflect that the blood thins with the decrease of the tissues and enriches as they increase."

Now we would certainly reverse this statement. It is true that, roughly stated, impoverishment of the blood goes with a decrease of the tissues. But while this statement will do for practical purposes, it is certainly not true so far as the relations of the facts are concerned. The tissues do not nourish the blood of course, but just the contrary. But the statement of Dr. Mitchell strictly interpreted would seem to imply that the impoverishment of the blood *follows* the decrease of the tissues, and as a consequence of the same. Happily, however, no bad practical consequences arise from such dialectical blemishes.

Climate, in the opinion of Dr. Mitchell, "has a good deal to do with a tendency to take on fat." Alcoholism, inertness, especially such as we see in some cases of hysteria, in which there is a belief on the part of patients of incapacity to move, the use of morphia, etc. Quite interesting is the account given of certain "fat, anæmic people, usually women," in which there is often an unusually fine physical appearance, associated with great physical weakness. But no mere abstract of this chapter would do it justice. We must refer the reader to the work itself, for the suggestive, practical hints it contains.

One of the more important points to be secured in the management of the class of cases under consideration is their seclusion from disturbing influences, and especially from their customary relations, those which have surrounded them in their invalid period. Says Dr. Mitchell, "I have often made the effort to treat them in their own homes, and to isolate them there, but I have rarely done so without promising myself that I would not again complicate my treatment by any such embarrassment. Once separate such a patient from the moral and physical surroundings which have become part of her life of sickness, and you will have made a change which will be in itself beneficial, and will enormously aid in the treatment which is to follow." We have not the slightest doubt of the necessity for pursuing this course in a most firm and enterprising manner.

The next chapter is one of the most valuable, and relates to the function of *rest*, in the treatment of these worn, anæmic, neurasthenic cases. We have no expectation of impressing any member of the profession, in advance of a real personal experience, with the value of this simple matter in the management of such cases. But simple as it is, there are but few plain, practical subjects which require more detailed thought, more in the way of specific direction, and personal inquiry and supervision, in order to insure success.

But if such patients are actually unable to take exercise voluntarily, how shall we avoid on the one hand the evils of pro-

tracted inactivity and secure the advantages of exercise? "By *massage*," says Dr. Mitchell; viz., by *passive exercise*. And here again, about one physician in five hundred will probably be led to feel the real value of this phase of the treatment of the cases being discussed. It is really quite a study to know *how, when*, and how forcibly, or how long such treatment should be used; how to adapt it to various cases, and to what extent it may profitably supplant *active exercise*. Nothing less than a volume would suffice in which to do the subject justice.

The next chapter is given to the subject of electricity. Dr. Mitchell uses the induced current, and moist sponge electrodes to the back of the neck and to the feet,—the spinal current,—while the patient reclines, and he also employs a sort of electrical massage with the hand. But nearly everything will depend on the studied tact, the intelligence of the physician or operator, for if not tactfully used, the patient if not pained, may be thoroughly and needlessly disgusted by the blundering attempts made in the use of the electricity. We agree with Dr. Mitchell's estimate of its value.

The longest chapter in the work is on "Dietetics and Therapeutics." Dr. Mitchell finds it necessary to pay great personal attention to this matter. Every one will admit at first sight the importance of good feeding in such cases, but only the few will ever give that attention to the subject which will enable them to declare in a positive and thoughtful way what good feeding is, and just what will be adapted to different cases. Only the few will give those minute directions as to diet, or will see to it from day to day that they are carried out, which are so necessary to success. But here lies one of the chief difficulties of the case. Physicians content themselves as a rule with the delivery of generalities in regard to rest, diet, exercise, etc., which it is vainly expected patients will apply to their courses of life. Any plan, however good, must as a rule fail under such circumstances.

Dr. Mitchell lays much stress on a "skimmed milk" diet, in the outset, in such cases as are referred to, reminding one of the so called "milk cure." Then follows in due time beef tea, beef-steak and other highly nutritious articles of diet, given in as large quantities as the patients can bear, with the view of *fattening* them. To this is added large doses of iron, at meals, either the sub-carbonate or the dialysed iron, and also extract of malt. But this latter does not seem to be what we ordinarily meet with, such as Liebig's, Loefflund's, and other extracts, but a species of strong beer or ale, "Hoff's Extract of Malt," and which is to be taken at meals.

By means of seclusion so as to avoid unnecessary friction or excitement, and in this way to diminish nervous waste, by rest or freedom from fatigue, and by the substitution of passive for active exercise, by the stimulating and soothing influence of electricity, by the best of food, and suitable restorative tonics, all

managed down to the finest details under the direction of the physician or a trusted attendant, by such means would Dr. Mitchell finally rescue such patients from the slough of despond into which they have fallen. Our own experience has been for years confirmatory in the main of Dr. Mitchell's, but we have found out long since that success can only come about by the most thorough and absolute attention to the plan of action, by taking from three months to a year in which to accomplish a cure, and above all, by not simply recognizing such a course as practicable and useful, but by faithfully *doing* the things recommended.

We can cordially recommend this little work to our readers.

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### SHORTER NOTICES.

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- I. A SERIES OF AMERICAN CLINICAL LECTURES. Edited by E. C. Seguin, M. D. Vol. I. New York. G. P. Putnam's Sons. 340 pages.
- II. TRANSACTIONS OF THE AMERICAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION. PRIZE ESSAY. SUPPLEMENT TO VOL. 27, 1876. EXCISION OF THE LARGER JOINTS OF THE EXTREMITIES. By H. Culbertson, M. D. Philadelphia 1876. 692 pages.
- III. ALCOHOL AS A FOOD AND MEDICINE. A paper from the Transactions of the International Medical Congress at Philadelphia, Sept., 1876. By Ezra M. Hunt, A. M. M. D. New York, 1877, National Temperance Soc. and Publication House. 137 pages.
- IV. THE MORTALITY OF SURGICAL OPERATIONS IN THE UPPER LAKE STATES, compared with that of other regions. By Edmund Andrews, A. M. M. D. assisted by Thomas B. Lacey, M. D. Chicago 1877. 123 pages.
- V. THE CURABILITY OF INSANITY. By Pliny Earle, A. M., M. D. Read before the New England Psychological Society on retiring from office as its President, December 14, 1876, and published by that society. Utica. 1877. 52 pages.
- VI. SONS OR DAUGHTERS? CHOOSE! By George B. Starkweather. Hartford, 1877. 411 pages.

I. Glancing over the twelve lectures constituting the series of 1876, one may be in doubt as to the class of readers for whom they are intended. None of them are—strictly speaking—original. Many of them, however, are not